

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
USLO PEKING
AMEMBASSY SEOUL
AMEMBASSY TAIPEI
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY VIETNAME
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L HONG KONG 10973

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, CH, VM, CB
SUBJ: SINO-VIETNAMESE RELATIONS -- ANOTHER VIEW

REF: (A) HONG KONG 10458; (B) PEKING 2453; (C) HONG KONG 7757

INTRODUCTION: OUR LATEST EFFORT IN SINO-VIETNAMESE
RELATIONS (REF A) HAS PROVOKED A SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT INTER-
PRETATION OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THIS AREA BY TWO OF OUR
POLICITCAL OFFICERS. GIVEN THE INHERENT DIFFICULTY OF
DIVINING CHINESE AND VIETNAMESE INTENTIONS, WE BELIVE
ADDRESSEE POSTS SHOULD HAVE THE BENEFIT OF THIS DIVERGENT
VIEW IN THE HOPE OF CONTRIBUTING TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF
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AN ISSUE OF CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE TO THE U.S. THE
FINDING OF THESE OFFICERS FOLLOWS:

1. SUMMARY: RATHER THAN REPRESENTING A MAJOR MOVE, THE
CHINESE OFFER OF NEGOTIATIONS WAS A TACTICAL MOVE AND WE
AGREE WITH REF B THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS ARE FOR ALL PRACTICAL
PUPOSES "A SHAM". ALTHOUGH THE SCENARIO SUGGESTED IN

REF A IS EMINENTLY RATIONAL, WE DO NOT FEEL THAT EITHER THE CHINESE OR THE VIETNAMESE ARE FOLLOWING A RATIONAL APPROACH. WE EXPECT THE POLEMICS TO CONTINUE AND THE RELATIONSHIP TO BECOME EVEN MORE SEVERELY STRAINED, AS ANTOGNISMS ARE EXACERBATED BY VIETNAMESE DETERMINATION TO PRESS THE CAMPAIGN IN KAMPUCHEA. END SUMMARY.

2. IT APPEARS TO US THAT THE CHINESE, HAVING GOTTEN AS MUCH MILEAGE AS POSSIBLE FROM THE PRESENCE OF THEIR SHIPS OFF THE VIETNAMESE COAST, WERE COMPELLED BOTH TO MOVE THE BATTLE OF POLEMICS TO A NEW AREANA AND TO FIND A FACE-SAVING WAY TO GET THE SHIPS BACK HOME. THE OFFER OF VICE-MINISTERIAL LEVEL TALKS NICELY SERVED BOTH PURPOSES. THAT THE CHINESE HAD NO INTENTION OF GENUINELY SEEKING A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM IS EVIDENCED BY THE CONTINUANCE OF SCATHING COMMENTARY AGAINST THE VIETNAMESE, AND THE SPEECH OF CHINESE DELEGATION HEAD CHUNG HSI-TUNG AT THE OPENING SESSION OF THE NEGOTIATIONS, IN WHICH HE ONCE MORE LAYS THE BLAME FOR THE DIFFICULTIES SQUARELY AND VEHEMENTLY ON THE VIETNAMESE. THE VICE-MINISTERIAL LEVEL NEGOTIATIONS HAVE SIMPLY PROVIDED A HIGHER OFFICIAL FORM FOR ACrimonious EXCHANGES BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES.

3. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THE CHINESE ARE MOTIVATED BY CONCERN THAT THEY MIGHT DRIVE THE VIETNAMESE DEEPER INTO THE SOVIET CAMP. WE THINK THAT THEY WROTE THE VIETNAMESE OFF AS HOPELESS BEFORE THEY "WENT PUBLIC" WITH THE DISPUTE IN MAY, CONFIDENTIAL

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AND WE EXPECT TO SEE A CONTINUANCE OF THE "LITTLE HEGEMONIST", "ASIAN CUBA" CHARACTERIZATIONS. WE ALSO THINK IT MOST UNLIKELY THAT THE CHINESE EVER REALLY THOUGHT THE SOVIETS HAD ESTABLISHED A BASE AT CAM RANH BAY, A HIGHLY VISIBLE LOCATION. RATHER, WE SUSPECT THAT THEY BROUGHT UP THIS ACCUSATION EITHER AS A PREVENTATIVE MEASURE IN CASE THE VIETNAMESE WERE CONSIDERING SUCH A MOVE, OR SIMPLY AS ONE MORE PROVOCATIVE ISSUE TO THROW INTO THE POLEMICAL POT.

4. AS REF C NOTED, THE OVERSEAS CHINESE ISSUE WAS MERELY A PRETEXT FOR THE CHINESE TO EXPRESS THEIR INTENSE DISSATISFACTION WITH THE VIETNAMESE TILT TOWARD THE SOVIETS. THEIR LACK OF GENUINE CONCERN FOR THEIR "COMPATRIOTS" IS DEMONSTRATED BY THEIR CLOSING OF THE BORDER, AND IGNORING THE PLIGHT OF THE 3000 STRANDED THERE. MOREOVER, WE HAVE SEEN LITTLE TO INDICATE THAT THE CHINESE ARE GIVING MUCH CONSIDERATION TO THE EFFECT OF THEIR ACTIONS ON SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS WITH LARGE CHINESE POPULATIONS. NOR DID THEY APPEAR TO FULLY ANTICIPATE THE PROBLEMS THAT WOULD BE CAUSED BY A REFUGEE POPULATION IN THEIR SOUTHERN PROVINCES MADE UP OF SOME 160,000 PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT EASY TO ASSIMILATE. THE DIFFICULTIES WHICH HAVE ARISEN MAY BE ONE REASON THEY CLOSED THE BORDER. WE SUSPECT THIS

ACTION WAS ALSO AN ATTEMPT TO PRESSURE THE VIETNAMESE INTO LETTING THEM USE THE SHIPS FOR ALL EVACUATION ACTIVITIESM

5. WE FIND LITTLE EVIDENCE THAT EITHER SIDE IS THINKING RATIONALLY ABOUT THEIR CONFLICTING INTERESTS IN INDOCHINA, OR THE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR ACTIONS, ALTHOUGH, AS REF C NOTED, BOTH SIDES FROM THE BEGINNING WERE PROBABLY COMMITTED TO STOPPING SHORT OF ARMED CONFLICT. IF THE VIETNAMESE WERE GENUINELY DESIROUS OF DEFUSING THE SITUATION, THEY MIGHT HAVE ATTEMPTED TO EASE THEIR MILITARY PRESSURE AGAINST KAMPUCHEA. INSTEAD, THEY HAVE TAKEN ADDITIONAL TERRITORY IN THE EASTERN PROVINCES. FOR THEIR PART, IF THE CHINESE HAD REALLY WANTED TO HELP MATTERS, THEY WOULD HAVE CEASED PUBLISHING THEIR COMMENTARIES
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AND CEASED INSISTING ON IDENTIFYING THE "PERSECUTED" CHINESE. AS IT IS, WE BELIEVE THE POLEMICS WILL INTENSIFY IF ANYTHING, GIVEN EVERY SIGN OF VIETNAMESE DETERMINATION TO PERSIST IN THEIR KAMPUCHEAN CAMPAIGN.

6. WE AGREE WITH REF A'S ASSESSMENT THAT THE CHINESE WILL LIMIT THEIR AID TO KAMPUCHEA AND NOT DIRECTLY ENGAGE IN THE CONFLICT, EVEN IF THE POL POT GOVERNMENT, AS WE EXPECT, SHOULD FALL. WE THINK ANY SIGNIFICANT CHINESE INTERVENTION IS UNLIKELY BECAUSE OF THE ENORMITY OF THE LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS AND THE UNACCEPTABLE STRAIN ON THEIR OWN ECONOMY IF THE CHINESE WERE TO INSERT COMBAT UNITS INTO KAMPUCHEA. THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO FOLLOW THE TRADITIONAL CHINESE POLICY OF NON-INTERVENTION IN AREAS NOT CONTIGUOUS TO THEIR OWN BORDERS, PERHAPS USING THE PRINCIPLE OF SELF-RELIANCE AND THE MILITARY DOCTRINE OF NEVER FIGHTING OUTSIDE THEIR OWN FRONTIERS AS THEIR RATIONALE. IT MUST ALSO BE NOTED THAT

THE PRESENT REGIME IN PHNOM PENH, PERHAPS NOT REPRESENTING THE FACTION SUPPORTED BY THE CHINESE DURING THE WAR IN CAMBODIA, HAS NOT BEEN SUSCEPTIBLE TO CHINESE ADVICE. THE RECENT VISIT OF SON SEN'S MILITARY DELEGATION TO PEKING IS THE LATEST INDICATION THAT ALL MAY NOT BE WELL IN THE RELATIONSHIP. WE SUSPECT THAT SON SEN, AND IENG SARY, WHO STOPPED OVER ON HIS RETURN FROM THE NONALIGNED CONFERENCE, WENT HOME LESS THAN SATISFIED. SON SEN AT THE CLOSE OF THE CONSULTATIONS STATED THAT THE TALKS HAD PROCEEDED IN AN "ATMOSPHERE OF UTMOST SINCERITY," A FORMULATION OFTEN USED WHEN THERE HAS BEEN DISAGREEMENT.
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